



**Proceedings
of the
Indian History Congress**

54th SESSION, MYSORE (1993)

DELHI 1994

THE NON-COOPERATION, GANDHI AND ALIGARH (1920)

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I

- 1.1 The importance of the Movement in India's Non-Cooperation struggle for freedom hardly needs any emphasis. It was during the non-cooperation Movement that the Nationalist succeeded in breaking quite a few bastions of the loyalists. One such bastion was Aligarh where majority of the Trustees of the M.A.O. College had their sway over the Aligarh politics. Inspite of this the young nationalists like Maulana Muhammad Ali, Shaukat Ali and other like-minded students succeeded in creating an atmosphere which generated Nationalist activities much to the chagrin of the Loyalist Trustees of the M.A.O. college who became perplexed over such developments. To add to their discomfiture, the Ali brothers succeeded in persuading Gandhiji in Calcutta perhaps in September 1920 at the time of the session of the Muslim League held at Calcutta, to visit Aligarh to strengthen the Nationalists at the M.A.O. College.¹
- 1.2 Accompanied with Swami Satya Deo, Maulana Azad Subhani, Jan Mohammad and others Gandhiji reached Aligarh in evening of 11th October 1920. Gandhiji's presence in Aligarh seems to have caused great concern to the Loyalists. Shaikh Abullah's² description of Gandhiji's visit to M.A.O. College reflects the consternation of the Loyalists in these words:

"This caravan reached Aligarh. Gandhi stayed at the house of Amir

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Mustafa³ Khan and Ali brothers stayed at the old Boys' Lodge with their friends. I asked Dr. Ziauddin Sahib, the then Principal (M.A.O. College) that Ali brothers and others should not be allowed to enter the College campus because they are coming with the intention to disturb our arrangements. But here Dr. Ziauddin Sahib showed weakness. He said if we do so 'the students who are with us would rise against us'.⁴

1.3 However, the comment and behaviour of the Principal M.A.O. College as reported by Shaikh Abdullah, a Loyalist, suggest that the students on the Non-Cooperation issue were divided in the College Campus and perhaps majority of them was supporting the Nationalist group and was in favour of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Shaikh Abdullah sincerely felt that if the students would join Gandhiji it would harm the community. His concern seems to have coloured his description of Dr. Ziauddin's meeting with Gandhiji. His version of the meeting is as follows: Principal M.A.O. College said: If the students are misled and persuaded to quit the college, it would harm the College and Muslim Community greatly. Gandhiji replied, "When there would be our Government we would build a great College. At present we wish to get the College buildings and Boarding houses vacated and establish Congress office and lodge Congress volunteers there."⁵

II

2.1 The whole account given by Shaikh Abdullah does not seem to be correct. Dr. Ziauddin learnt of Ali brothers and Gandhiji's programme at Lucknow only on 10th October. He dashed to Aligarh. His position was quite delicate. As Principal of the M.A.O. College he had been under the continuous pressure of the Trustees to see that there is no response to the Non-Cooperation call given by the Indian National Congress and the All India Khilafat Committee. He however met Gandhiji on the evening of 11th October and reminded him of his promises made in Delhi in March 1920, that he would issue a manifesto to the students not to participate in the active politics. Dr. Ziauddin wished to know from Gandhiji the cause for his changed stand. Gandhiji replied that the Hunter Commission's Report and the terms of the Treaty of Peace with Turkey had greatly influenced his opinion. Dr. Ziauddin then objected to Gandhiji's direct appeal to the students without the consent of the Trustees, Teachers and Principal. Gandhiji replied that from academic point of view he would not support this attitude but for higher political reasons he would reject such academic niceties.⁶

2.2 The author of the *Zia-i Hayat* admits that Gandhiji knew that the Trustees would not risk Government Grants and the teachers in general were not prepared to loose their jobs. Hence Gandhiji made direct appeal to the students.⁷ It will be noted that Dr. Ziauddin did not refer to Gandhiji's promise of construction of a big college after the establishment of his government. Moreover, such statements were alien to Gandhiji's style.

III

3.1 Despite opposition by the Loyalists, the Nationalists led by Maulana Mohammad Ali organised a meeting in the afternoon of the 12th October 1920. The Nationalist students of the M.A.O. College gave a memorable reception to Gandhiji. He was

also given the honorary membership of the Union Club.⁸ Mohammad Ali delivered an impressive speech. Supporting Maulana Mohd Ali's views Gandhiji spoke referring to the Khilafat question :

"...the heart of the Muslim brethren have, therefore, been pained. The next thing is that the actions of the Government in the Panjab after passing of the Rowalatt Act have convinced both Hindus and Muslims that it is impossible to get justice from this government... They made us - Hindus and Muslims_ quarrel among ourselves. They used to speak very ill of Hindus before Muslims and Mulims before Hindus...If Islam is in danger today, Hinduism is also in danger, for if it is Islam's turn today, it will be ours tomorrow... Both (Hindus and Muslims) have decided that by fighting with the sword they would lose their money, their precious lives and they would be unsaved still more, as they do not possess guns and ammunitions in such quantities. We have received no such training from the goverment... We are taught the lessons of slavery in the Aligarh College. We should boycott this slavish education. This is my first lesson... . When thirty crore of men combine and organise with a view not to have this Government in their midst, it have this Government in their midst, it would be impossible for government to remain in India... . we should boycott Government Educational Institutions. It is the same for us that we have not as yet left them as the Non-Cooperation Movement has been in existence for some months. We should give up practicing as their lawyers. We will become mendicants. We will beg. We will subsist on rice and pulses. We will accept bare bread but will take our libery also with it. It is then alon we can be counted among the human beings. No one who is not free can engage himself in devotion of God.... We do not want their titles. We regard their titles as badges of slavery and want to return them. We do no want to send a single soldier a labourer in theri (army). It is our right and no one can use force towards us in this respect We are not going to enter their legislative councils.... Non-Cooperation is nothing more than sacrifice....India has to pay seven crore of rupees for cloth and therefore Swadeshi Movement has also been included in this...,Non-Copperation with one means Cooperation with others. Unless we have mutual regard for each other we can not become united or organised".⁹

3.2 Swami Satya Deo in his speech reciprocated Gandhiji's views.¹⁰ The speeches seem to have stirred the feelings of the students and teachers.¹¹ Gandhiji left Aligarh but Ali brothers remained there and tried to mobilise the students through their speeches. This struggle between the Nationalists and the Loyalists continued till 29th of October. It culminated into the foundation of an independent institution, 'The National Muslim University' in Aligarh which is now known as the Jamia Millia, New Delhi. Gandhiji made an appeal to the parents of the Aligarh boys through a letter published in *Young India* dated November 3, 1920. The letter though already is well known still worth reproducing:

"Gentlemen,... to me it (Government) is satanic even as was the system under Ravana's rule according to scriptures of my religion. But my friends are not so convinced, as I am, of supreme necessity of ending this rule

unless the system undergoes a radical change and there is definite repentance on the part of the rulers.

I share too your concern about your boys who are learning at Aligarh I am convinced that I am doing no violence to the feelings of parents when I address your youngmen and ask them to leave the schools and Colleges....in fact my advice to the boys was even to discuss with their parents the question of leaving before arriving the decision.

I have myself appealed to thousands of parents at scores of meetings at which hardly a parent has objected to the proposition of leaving government controlled schools I therefore take leave to think that the parents of the Aligarh boys are not less convinced than the others of the necessity of withdrawing their children from the schools and colleges supported or controlled by the government that has participated in betraying the Musalmans in India and has wantonly humiliated the Nation through its barbarous treat of the Punjab.

... Shall we not free them (boys) from the curse of slavery which has made us crawl on our bellies.... Surely they would not need government University degrees...our existing religious and charitable Hindu and Muslim funds can support our education without even a week of self denial...."¹²

- 3.3 Despite opposition to the Non-Cooperation movement in Aligarh, there were many persons even among the Loyalists who adopted National practices such as British the boycott of British cloth and use of Khadi. So much so that Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan, even after assuming the charge of the Vice-Chancellorship of Aligarh Muslim University used to dress himself in Khadi.¹³
- 3.4 It will thus be seen that Aligarh did not lay behind the Non-cooperation Movement. Its alumnii led by the Ali Brothers took a leading part breaking the tradition of the loyalism.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth.*, Tr. M. Desai, Ahmedabad, 1927, p.540.
2. Shaikh Abdullah was great advocate of female education and in November 1906, he started a girls' school at Aligarh which later on became the Women's College of the Aligarh Muslim University.
3. Amir Mustafa Khan Sherwani was great Nationalist Product of the M.A.O. College. He was also a Trustee of M.A.O. College. Aligarh, F. Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims*, Cambridge, 1974, p.301.
4. Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah *Mushahidat-o Taasurat*, Delhi, 1969, pp.294-95. He is not very accurate and says that Gandhiji came directly from Calcutta. Samshur Rahman Muslim follows Sk Abdullah, see *Hayat-i-Abdullah*. Aligarh (ND) pp. 106-7. As a matter of fact Gandhiji had been in Moradabad on 11 October from where he came to Aligarh cf. *The collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 18, Delhi, 1965 pp 344-45.

5. *Mushahidat-o-Taasurat*, pp. 294-95.
6. Mohammad Amin Zubairi, *Zia-i Hayat*, Karachi (ND) pp.68-69.
7. *Zia-i Hayat*, pp. 68-69.
8. *Bombay Chronicle*, October 16, 1920
9. Deptt. of Police. S.No. 16/3 U.P. State Archives Lucknow, A Summary of Gandhiji's speech has been reproduced in *Collected Works* 18, p. 345. He is reported to have said that, "This work is certainly destructive, but the weeds which have grown need to be rooted out so that a good crop may be sown". Gandhiji further questioned the extent of loyalty to the Raj, its bureaucracy and the Union Jack. And finally he referred to the apprehension of the students that "participation in the Non-Cooperation would lead to the stoppage of Government aid: (Collected Works 18p.345). Interestingly in his autobiography Gandhiji very briefly refers to his Aligarh visit in these words. "A little while after this I was taken by the friends of the Muslim College Aligarh. There I invited the Youngmen to be fakirs for the service of the motherland", *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Mahadeo Desai,Ahmedabad, 1945, p. 540.
10. *Dept of Police S. No. 16/3, U.P. State Archives Lucknow.*
11. Bombay Chornicle gives a self contradictory report of Gandhiji's visit to M.A.O. College. It admits that " it was a mass (ive) meeting in their Club of which Mr. Gandhi was already a member", then reports that Gandhiji's meeting got a poor response. *Bombay Chornicle*, October 16, 1920.
12. Young India, Nov. 3 1920 it also has been in Intelligence Report of Coll 210-216 & KW-DEE-A. 1920 NAI National Archives New Delhi, See also *The Colleected Works*, pp.421-422.
13. Ziauddin Ahmad, *Bayan*, Aligarh (ND) p.37.